

South Asian Stories

History & Origins of South Asian Canadians

**A Curriculum for
English Language Arts 7 – 9
Social Studies 7 – 9**

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Image: Sikhs on board the Komagata Maru, 1914. (LAC MIKAN 3367763)

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Nusri Hassam, M.Ed. and South Asian Stories producer Gordon McLennan who thoughtfully contributed to the development of the South Asian Stories Study Guide.

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Introduction

Canada is a multicultural society. Interactions among numerous cultures occur on a daily basis. Statistics Canada projects that nearly one in two Canadians (or between 44.2 and 49.9 per cent) could be an immigrant or the child of an immigrant by 2036. This is up from 38.2 per cent in 2011.

The largest visible minority group that makes up the diverse population of our country is the South Asian community (followed by Chinese and Black Canadians). Statistics Canada reports that South Asians would still be the group with the most people in 2036, as it was in 2011.

As of 2011, 1,615,145 Canadians had South Asian geographical origins, forming 4.9% of the Canadian population and 32% of Canada's Asian Canadian inhabitants. (Source: Wikipedia)

This South Asian Stories Study Guide shapes a part of local curriculum to further enrich classrooms in BC with this large breadth of diversity in Canada. Students will learn about the challenges and triumphs of this colourful and vibrant culture, which include awareness around important issues like the segregation and racism that ensued upon their initial entrance into Canada. Learners will also be informed on key aspects of South Asian community, as well as their many contributions to Canada, and to Canadian culture as a whole.

South Asian Stories is the third in a series of multicultural studies produced by Orbit Films. The first is **BlackStrathcona**, ten videos about Vancouver's black community (blackstrathcona.com), and the second is **Nikkei Stories** (www.nikkeistories.com), twenty videos about the history of Japanese Canadians in Vancouver and in Steveston.

This third series focuses on one facet of South Asians in BC, mostly the Sikh Community, which is one of the larger groups among the varied peoples of South Asian heritage in Vancouver. The term "South Asian" refers to immigrants hailing from the Indian subcontinent, which includes India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan and the Maldives.

Census Canada's definition of South Asians lists cultural backgrounds like Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil and Goan, in addition to cultures such as East Indian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan and Pakistani. Canadians from South Asia identify themselves by their country of origin such as Indian or Pakistani. They may also be identified by their specific cultural backgrounds, for example Punjabi or Tamil.

The Study Guide serves as an ample resource that can be modified to elementary and secondary classroom lessons on a variety of subjects including human rights, Canadian and immigrant history, multiculturalism, democracy in Canada and local histories.

It presents a Unit Plan for History & Origins of South Asian Canadians, from which educators can adjust the content to fit the needs of varied learners, while making curriculum connections for English Language Arts 7 – 9 and Social Studies 7 – 9.

Learners will link every lesson with journal reflections to form their own thoughts, ideas, beliefs and opinions on the arrival and integration of South Asians, and critically reflect on the history and democracy of Canada. Learners will draw parallels between history and origins of South Asian Canadians, and those of other ethnic minorities, while also making deeper connections with their own communities.

Lesson 1: First Arrivals

Students learn about the initial South Asians arriving into Canada including geographic locations, struggles and triumphs. Students will practice research and response related to discussion and written questions.

Lesson 2: Advocating for Justice

Students learn about how South Asians fought for rights, including some of the specific histories that took place, and place themselves in the histories.

Lesson 3: Creating a Sense of Community

Students take a closer look at how South Asians began to create a sense of community in a new foreign land. Students will have an opportunity to visit South Asian community spaces and present what they have learned, and share reflections relating to their own communities, as well as experiences in other ethnic communities.

Lesson 4: Contributions to BC, Canada

Students learn about some of the significant people, and practice research and reflection concerning the inspiring challenges South Asians overcame. Students apply this reflection within their own lives.

Lesson 5: Celebrating Diversity in Arts & Culture

Students learn about some of the celebrations, art and tradition South Asians have brought to Canada, how they are practiced, and have an opportunity to engage in them.

Curriculum Connections

Big Ideas (Core) - Social Studies 7/8/9

Grade 7

- Religious and cultural practices that emerged during this period have endured and continue to influence people. (7)

Grade 8

- Contacts and conflicts between peoples stimulated significant cultural, social, political change. (8)
- Exploration, expansion, and colonization had varying consequences for different groups. (8)
- Changing ideas about the world created tension between people wanting to adopt new ideas and those wanting to preserve established traditions. (8)

Grade 9

- Emerging ideas and ideologies profoundly influence societies and events. (9)
- Collective identity is constructed and can change over time. (9)

Big Ideas (Core) - English Language Arts Grades 7/8/9

- Exploring and sharing multiple perspectives extends our thinking. (7)
- Language and text can be a source of creativity and joy. (7,8,9)
- Exploring text and story helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world. (7,8,9)
- Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens. (7,8,9)

Curricular Competencies - Social Studies 7/8/9

Grade 7

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions. (7,8,9)
- Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments at particular times and places (significance). (7,8)
- Explain different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, or events, and compare the values, worldviews, and beliefs of human cultures and societies in different times and places (perspective). (7)

- Make ethical judgments about past events, decisions, or actions, and assess the limitations of drawing direct lessons from the past (ethical judgment). (7)

Grade 8

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions. (7,8,9)
- Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments at particular times and places (significance). (7,8)
- Determine which causes most influenced particular decisions, actions, or events, and assess their short- and long-term consequences (cause and consequence). (8)

Grade 9

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions. (7,8,9)
- Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments, and compare varying perspectives on their historical significance at particular times and places, and from group to group (significance). (7,8,9)
- Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups at the same time period (continuity and change). (9)
- Assess how prevailing conditions and the actions of individuals or groups affect events, decisions, or developments (cause and consequence). (9)

Curricular Competencies English Language Arts Grades 7/8/9

Grade 7

- Access information and ideas for diverse purposes and from a variety of sources and evaluate their relevance, accuracy, and reliability. (7, 8, 9)
- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking. (7, 8, 9)
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts. (7, 8, 9)
- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts.
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world. (7, 8, 9)
- Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways. (7, 8, 9)
- Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking. (7, 8, 9)

Grade 8

- Access information and ideas for diverse purposes and from a variety of sources and evaluate their relevance, accuracy, and reliability. (7, 8, 9)

- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking. (7, 8, 9)
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts. (7, 8, 9)
- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts.
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world. (7, 8, 9)
- Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways. (7, 8, 9)
- Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking. (7, 8, 9)
- Transform ideas and information to create original texts. (8/9)

Grade 9

- Access information and ideas for diverse purposes and from a variety of sources and evaluate their relevance, accuracy, and reliability. (7, 8, 9)
- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking. (7, 8, 9)
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts. (7, 8, 9)
- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts. (7, 8, 9)
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- Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways. (7, 8, 9)
- Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking. (7, 8, 9)
- Transform ideas and information to create original texts. (8/9)

Content – Social Studies

Social Studies 7

- Origins, core beliefs, narratives, practices, and influences of religions, including at least one indigenous to the Americas. (7)

Social Studies 8

- Exploration, expansion, and colonization. (8)

Social Studies 9

- Discriminatory policies, attitudes, and historical wrongs. (9)
- Global demographic shifts, including patterns of migration and population growth. (9)

Content – English Language Arts

Grade 7

- Forms, function and genres. (7/8/9)
- Language features, structures, and conventions. (7/8/9)
- Questioning; predicting; previewing text; summarizing; making inferences. (7)
- Developing paragraphs that are characterized by unity, development, and coherence. (7)

Grade 8

- Forms, function and genres. (7/8/9)
- Language features, structures, and conventions. (7/8/9)

Grade 9

- Forms, function and genres. (8/9)
- Language features, structures, and conventions. (8/9)
- Developing multi-paragraph compositions that are characterized by unity, development, and coherence. (9)

(Source: <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/search>)

Curriculum Rationale

The South Asian Stories Study Guide can inspire learners to both be conscious of and contribute to a truly multicultural Canada. All the while educating students on dissolving even present-day barriers between cultures, while guiding an awareness where all individuals and groups are respected and valued.

The Study Guide with its lesson plan suggestions, including the possibility of field trips to Vancouver neighbourhoods, enables teachers to cover curriculum objectives for students in Grades 7 to 9 in cross-cultural studies. Not only does this unit stretch across time, bringing the past into the present, but it is also applicable throughout the year, giving teachers a much broader depth and scope beyond just studying the South Asian community on specific occasions or holidays.

The Study Guide encompasses a multitude of learning activities, which link to curriculum connections for Social Studies 7 – 9 and English Language Arts 7 – 9 – covering Big ideas, Content and Curricular Competencies (follows new curriculum requirements). Among others, this includes thinking critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts; constructing meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world; responding to text **in** personal, creative, and critical ways; and asking questions to gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; as well as communicating findings and decisions.

The Study Guide evokes students to engage empathy and morals, confront their assumptions, build on critical thinking, and assimilate ideas like human dignity and equality into their daily experience. Students learn that respect for differences of experience and point of view, as well as active engagement are vital to developing and sustaining an inclusive society.

Students learn how fear-based attitudes led to the formation and maintenance of discriminatory laws – and how morality and dignity can prevent this going forward, even on the subtlest of levels. This includes within current communities, neighbourhoods and schools.

Students learn about how and why South Asians journeyed to Canada, their challenges and triumphs to being treated as equals, how they created a sense of community, and all the ways in which they contributed to Canadian society. Students learn to recognize the social injustices that have been inflicted by creating a thoughtful, deep awareness about this culture as well as their own. In turn, they develop a more profound understanding of themselves, their community and the world.

This Study Guide provides an interactive and informative learning opportunity, utilizing a plethora of diverse exercises and activities that are engaging, fun, reflective and inspirational.

Here's to the success of this educational contribution to support a truly multicultural and diverse Canada!



Image: The Gill family. (Betty (Banto) Gill: back row with scarf). 194_. (Gill Family)

Lesson Plans

First Arrivals

Advocating for Justice

Creating a Sense of Community

Contributions to Canada

Celebrating Diversity in Arts & Culture

First Arrivals

LESSON **ONE** | South Asian Stories | History & Origins of South Asian Canadians Unit

Watch the following three videos: First Immigrants, Gurdwara & Komagata Maru.
(approximately 12 minutes)

Prior Knowledge Check (10 min): Ask students to share what they know about the term “South Asians.” (Who are they? Where do they come from? Where do they live? Do they know any individuals of South Asian origin? Etc.)

Display a large class-size world map or a globe and ask students to point out all the countries that make up the “Indian Subcontinent.” 2 min (Refer to the Glossary on page 52 of this study guide for a list of the countries.)

Facilitate a 3 min discussion on why students think South Asians came to Canada from British-ruled India. What were their goals and dreams? What were they leaving behind?

Answer the following questions:

1. When did the first South Asians arrive and by which means did they arrive?

Answer:

2. What were the two types of work they came in search of?

Answer:

3. When did the Komagata Maru steamship arrive and how many passengers were on board?

Date:	Number of passengers:
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4. What was the legislation that was created to bar South Asians and other ethnicities from entering Canada? Who created this legislation and why do you think they did this?

Answer:

5. How many days was the standoff before the Canadian government deployed its army and navy to set off a forced takeover of the ship, and enforce its return?

Answer:

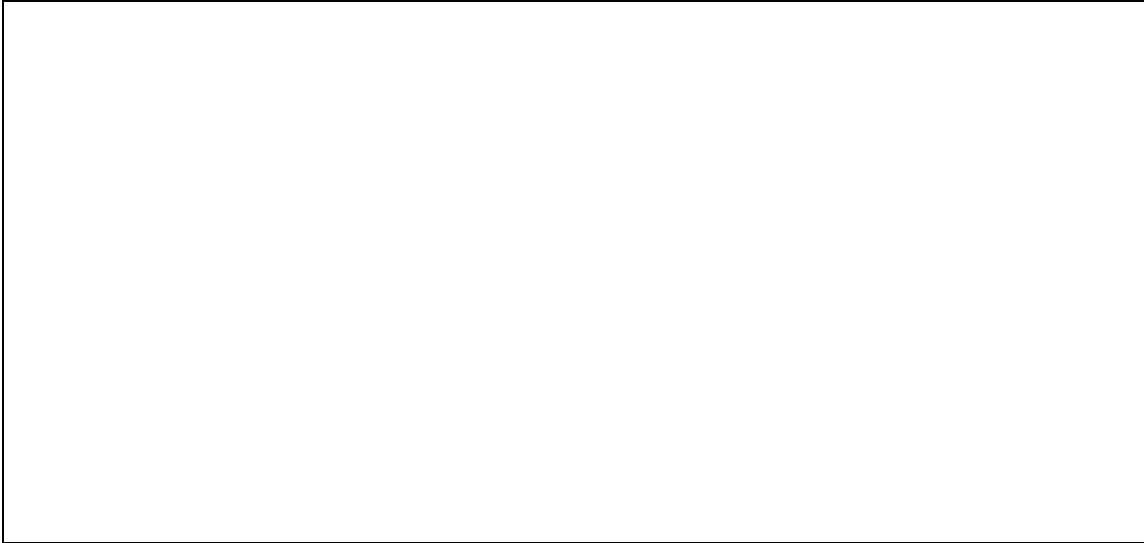
Activity:

In groups of 3 – 4, research and then map the route of the steamship starting from where its passengers originated from, to where it departed from, all the stops along the way, and finally to its exact destination in Vancouver. Timeline it. Illustrate your findings on poster board using colours to express the emotions when you empathize with the 376 passengers on the ship. Hang them around the classroom for student viewing.

Dates:	Stops:
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Imagine you were a passenger on the Komagata Maru steamship and you were able to write a postcard home. Write from the perspective of a parent or grandparent or a child. To whom are you writing to? Where is your home? What would you say? Describe your thoughts, emotions and feelings having made the long journey and then to be denied entry and held at sea for over two months awaiting your fate. Only to be ordered back to your homeland, which is being ruled by another country. Keep in mind the sights, smells, sounds, etc. Decorate the front of your postcard with archival images from the ship and/or draw your own. Include a creative postage stamp, what currency will it be in?

<p>Dear: _____</p>

**Follow-up Activity:**

Postcards are distributed randomly back to students, who read them as the relative receiving them. They share their thoughts and feelings about what the writing invokes in them in groups of 3 - 4.

Class wrap-up:

Why do you think people from other countries settled in Canada? How did they impact First Nations communities? Be prepared to talk about colonial and indigenous histories in this question.

Journal reflection:

Where are your ancestors from? Did they originally immigrate to Canada? Interview a family elder to find out if you are unsure. How far back can you go? For example can you go beyond your grandparents? Do they know where their parents or grandparents were born?

Answer the following questions:

1. Where are your ancestors from?
2. How did they live in those times back in their homeland? What are some of the challenges they faced in transitioning/integrating into life in Canada? What are some of the advantages/benefits they enjoyed in comparison to their homeland?

Alternate activity:

Alternate activity for those who it is not possible to access lineage: Why are people interested in their heritage? Do you think it is important, why or why not?

Advocating for Justice

LESSON **TWO** | South Asian Stories | History & Origins of South Asian Canadians Unit

Review of the first lesson (5 min): Ask students to brainstorm whatever they recall about the first lesson. (Who are South Asians, where did they come from, what was the Komagata Maru incident, etc.)

Watch the following three videos: First Immigrants, Gurdwara & Komagata Maru.
(approximately 12 minutes)

Facilitate a 10 - 15 min discussion asking students to define the term “discrimination.” Consider age, race, height, gender, ability, religion, and attire. Cite the 1988 Baltej Singh Dhillon example where he was denied a RCMP career at first because he wore a turban. Discuss other examples like the hijab.

Answer the following questions:

1. What year was the South Asians right to vote taken away? What year was it restored?

Answer:

2. Why do you think South Asians were discriminated, despite their reputation for being hardworking and reliable? Is this the basis of respect? Or should we respect people no matter what their “utility?”

Answer:

3. Give an example of another ethnic minority group that was segregated during this same time period. (Japanese, Chinese, Blacks, etc.) What were their challenges and triumphs along the way? In groups of 3 - 4, complete the compare and contrast chart in point form below. Circle any similarities.

Challenges of South Asian Movement	Challenges of _____ Movement	Triumphs of South Asian Movement	Triumphs of _____ Movement
<u>Example:</u> - “continuous journey” legislation.	<u>Example:</u> - Japanese internment.	<u>Example:</u> - in 1947 right to vote restored.	<u>Example:</u> - redress in 1988.

Then present your findings to the class in a 3-minute presentation. Groups on opposing sides can stage a debate.

Activity

Imagine you were on the Komagata Maru steamship. Create a striking placard (sign board) with your message to the Canadians observing you from both the seashore and through the media. What do you want to tell the local Canadians?

Essay:

Research the 1907 anti-Asian movement in BC and write an essay on your findings. What and/or who spearheaded it? What were their motives? Do you agree or disagree? Elaborate on your view.

Activity:

Since South Asians felt they came from a British Commonwealth nation, they believed they could therefore move within the British Commonwealth – however they were denied this right. Do you agree or disagree? In groups of 2-4 take a side and have a discussion. Prepare a 3-minute presentation to debate your position in class.

Class wrap-up:

What types of discrimination do you see happening in your community? Consider all the ways in which people or groups are stereotyped, including the First Nations. Be prepared to talk about colonial and indigenous histories.

Journal reflection:

Describe a time or situation when you felt different from others around you. What types of feeling and emotions did this invoke in you? What could have made that situation more comfortable for you? How can you apply this learning to similar situations that you witness others facing in your presence?

Creating a Sense of Community

LESSON **THREE** | South Asian Stories | South Asian Canadian History Unit

Review of the second lesson (10 min): Ask students to brainstorm whatever they recall about the second lesson. Then open up the discussion to other voting rights such as when did women finally get to vote in North America? Or civil society rights such as the Viola Desmond incident.

Watch the following two videos: Gurdwara & Punjabi Market.
(approximately 8 minutes)

Facilitate a 10 min discussion about concentrations of immigrants with similar cultural background in Vancouver. Are there other places with this concentration in Vancouver? (Japanese, African, Chinese, Filipino, Jewish, Greek, Korean, Italian, etc.) Are there any other ethnic areas in other cities that students have visited or lived in?

Answer the following questions:

1. Where is Punjabi Market situated?

Answer:

Field Trip with follow-up activity:

Teacher facilitates field trip to Punjabi Market (or other local South Asian shopping neighbourhood) asking students to take notes and pictures of their experience.

Upon return, students get into pairs and create a photo essay or storyboard depicting an aspect of today's Punjabi Market. Display these around the classroom for 1-2 weeks to give students an opportunity to view and have discussions around the displays.

Facilitate a 10 min discussion: How does the present day Punjabi Market compare with the original Punjabi Market portrayed in the video? Which of the businesses mentioned in the video still remain there?

Answer the following questions:

1. List three reasons why you might visit Punjabi Market.

1.
2.
3.

Activity:

Where is the largest population of South Asians presently concentrated in the Lower Mainland? Where is the largest South Asian shopping district presently? Create a colourful map illustrating these locations.

Answer the following questions:

1. Where was the first Sikh temple of North America located and when was it completed?

Answer:

2. What are the similarities and differences between a temple (or another place of worship that may include a church, mosque, synagogue, etc.) and a community centre? As a class, compare them using various factors that can include purpose, programing (activities and events)/architecture/location/clientele and their age groups, size, aesthetics, etc. Complete the chart below in point form and circle the similarities.

Temple/other place of worship:	Community Centre
<u>Example:</u> - a place to gather for worship and specific meetings.	- besides meetings, it's also a place for exercise classes and workshops.

2. Research the Sikh tradition and one other South Asian tradition (Hindu, Muslim, etc.). In groups of 3 – 4 complete the chart below with five new facts you have learned about each tradition. Circle any connections between the traditions.

Sikh Tradition	Other tradition: _____
<u>Example:</u> - their place of worship is called a gurdwara.	<u>Example: Hinduism</u> - their place of worship is called a mandir.

Field trip:

Organize a field trip to the local gurdwara. Class takes a full tour and stays for lunch offered to all attendees. There is a Q&A with the tour leader from the gurdwara.

Follow-up activity: Teacher facilitates a 10-minute discussion on other places of gathering/worship for South Asians that may include but are not limited to a mandir (Hindu temple), mosque, synagogue, church, etc. How do they compare with a gurdwara? What are the

similarities and differences? Discuss parameters such as purpose/programming (activities and events)/architecture/location/clientele and their age groups/size/aesthetics, etc.

Class wrap-up: Why is community important? Why do people who share the same background need a place to gather? If you don't belong to the community, would you feel welcome, why or why not? Is it important we learn about other cultures other than our own? Why? Or why not? What do you know about the First Nations people in your community?

Journal reflection:

Describe your own community. What structures are in place for your community to gather? What types of meeting, events and groups gather there? Do you take part in community gatherings? If so, what kinds of gatherings? How do they enrich your life? If not, why not?

Contributions to Canada

LESSON **FOUR** | South Asian Stories | History & Origins of South Asian Canadians Unit

Review of the third lesson (10 min): Ask students to brainstorm whatever they recall about the third lesson. What new ideas have they learned? From the visit to the gurdwara, were they told that Sikhs believe no one should go hungry, hence the gurdwara serves food daily to all who come regardless of their faith. What are some advantages and disadvantages of the role of religion in people's lives?

Watch the following 5 videos: Banto (Betty) Gill, Ajaib (Jab) Sidhoo, Harjit Dhillon, Jagat (Jack) Uppal, Shushma Datt
(approximately 20 minutes)

Facilitate a 10 min discussion asking students to define the term “multiculturalism.” What does a Canadian look like? What kinds of people is Canada made up of, (including the First Nations communities)?

Activity:

In groups of 3-4 students make a collage/poster depicting multiculturalism with magazine cutouts on poster board. Use a diverse range of magazines including not just models or people of different ethnic backgrounds that can be found in publications like National Geographic, but also food and entertainment magazines. Have them posted around the classroom for viewing (leave them up for a couple of weeks to support the celebration of multiculturalism). Have students form new groups of 3-4 and observe a different poster board and describe the message they observe to the class.

In groups of 3 – 4 list the contributions in point form that each person made to his or her community. One point per column.

Banto (Betty) Gill	<u>Example:</u> - worked as interpreter for the Canadian Immigration Service at Vancouver Airport.				
Ajaib (Jab) Sidhoo					
Harjit Dhillon					

Jagat (Jack) Uppal					
Shushma Datt					

In new groups of 3 – 4, list the challenges in point form that each person overcame in their transition to integrating into Canadian life.

Banto (Betty) Gill	<u>Example:</u> - At 14, dropped out of school to help support her family.				
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Ajaib (Jab) Sidhoo					
Harjit Dhillon					
Jagat (Jack) Uppal					
Shushma Datt					

Answer the following questions:

1. How do you think Shushma Datt inspired other women in her community, as well as women from other ethnic minorities? Do you think she was a role-model for other non-South Asian women? Why or why not? Write 1 - 2 paragraphs.

Answer:

2. In the video depicting Jagat (Jack) Uppal's life, he was quoted as follows in his acceptance speech of the honorary doctorate from Simon Fraser University: "I love humanity and it is the essence of my being. I want to infect you with the same desire to do for others as you would do for yourself because greatness is defined by service."

What does this statement mean to you? How does it influence you? Write 1 – 2 paragraphs.

Answer:

3. In pairs research and list the top five imports to Canada from India and the top five exports to India from Canada.

Imports to Canada (from India)
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Exports from Canada (to India)
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Activity:

Although he could not vote Ajaib (Jab) Sidhoo served in the Canadian Army during WW2. In partners discuss the following: Would you fight for your country even though you did not have the right to vote? Why or why not? What types of feelings and emotions does this invoke in you? Why do you think he did so? Prepare a 3 minute presentation for the class.

Class wrap-up: Who inspires you in your community? What actions have they taken that encourage you to look up to them? Do you consider them a role-model? Why or why not?

Journal entry:

What contributions have you made to your community? How has this enriched your life? Are there any contributions that you still wish to make? What are they and what inspires this interest?

If you can't think of any contributions you've made to your community right now, what would you like to do for your community and how you can go about this?

Celebrating Diversity in Arts & Culture

LESSON **FIVE** | South Asian Stories | History & Origins of South Asian Canadians Unit

Review of the fourth lesson (10 min): Ask students to brainstorm what they recall about lesson four. Based on the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” discuss the strengths and challenges of being part of a community.

Watch the following 5 videos: First Immigrants, Punjabi Market, Banto (Betty) Gill, Shushma Datt & South Asian Arts.

(approximately 25 minutes)

Facilitate a 10 min discussion about diversity. What does it mean? How does your community celebrate diversity? Have you attended a First Nations celebration? Or would you like to? Why or why not?

Answer the following questions:

1. What were the two celebrations mentioned in the video: First Immigrants?

1.
2.

2. In pairs, research both celebrations and list five interesting facts in point form about each celebration that you were unaware of. Engage with South Asians in your community/school/neighbourhood for insight. If you are South Asian, try to find new interesting little-known facts about each celebration to share with the class.

Celebration 1: _____ <u>Example:</u> Diwali	Celebration 2: _____
1. <u>Example:</u> - also known as the “festival of light.”	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

3. Would you want to take part in one of these celebrations? If yes, how would you go about it? If not, why not? Is there another ethnic or family celebration you participate in? Or one that you would like to participate in? If you are South Asian and already celebrate these

occasions, tell us about another ethnic celebration you have participated in or would like to, and why. Write 1-2 paragraphs.

Answer:

4. In the Banto (Betty) Gill video, we learned that she was given private lessons to learn to read and write her mother tongue, Punjabi. Why do you think it's important to know your mother tongue even if you are growing up in a foreign land? Do you know any other languages? Which ones? How did this learning come into your life? Through ancestry, interest, or some other way? Write 1 – 2 paragraphs.

Answer:

5. Who was Rabindranath Tagore? What was his background? Choose a Tagore poem online and write one paragraph about what it means to you. In pairs discuss your reflections. What is similar in your reflections? What differs? Why? What new and/or interesting ideas did you learn?

Answer:

Activity:

In pairs research the Vancouver International Bhangra Celebration and the organization that coordinates this event. Create a colourful brochure depicting the who/what/when/where/why/how. Print pictures from online sources for your brochure and remember to source them.

Alternatively, research some bhangra music and teach those interested in dancing, how to do some Bhangra. See if you can get a hold of the customary attire by talking to South Asians in your class/school/neighbourhood/community. Or perhaps you are South Asian and have traditional clothing samples to bring in for this activity.

Activity:

As noted in the Shushma Datt video, the Rim Jhim network was the first 24-hour radio station for South Asians outside India. Listen to the station for 30 minutes and list three new interesting facts you learned about concerning an aspect of South Asian culture. If you are South Asian, listen to another ethnic radio station of your choice and list three new interesting facts you learned about regarding aspects of that particular culture.

1.

2.

3.

Answer the following question:

1. Do you listen to or watch any ethnic media? How does it enrich your life? If not, research an ethnic media station or program you would like to watch or listen to and explain why. How do you think it will enrich your life?

Answer:

Special Unit-End Event: Guest speaker: Q&A with Shushma Dutt (or another prolific member of the local South Asian Community). Topic: diversity/multiculturalism. Display some of the artwork around the classroom from this unit to support an “open house” for the History & Origins of South Asian Canadians Unit.

Related Activity for Unit-End event: In groups of 4 choose one aspect of South Asian culture (food, music, clothing, etc.) and research it. Then present it at the open house in your own chosen form (ie: make a recipe or create a recipe book; diverse music display that includes Bhangra, classical, pop, etc; or sport a sample of customary men’s and women’s attire and research its history, etc.) Create booths and displays that students, teacher and parents can visit during the open house.

Class wrap-up:

Mo Dhaliwal (narrator of the South Asian Arts video) said he formed the Vancouver International Bhangra Celebration to create a sense of belonging and sense of place for South Asians, who like himself in his adolescent life, most often felt misunderstood. Why do you think it's important to take steps to bridge this gap? What are some ways you see this happening in your community?

Journal entry:

Reflect on a time you felt misunderstood and out of place in your life. Describe the moment or situation, including the feeling and emotions that were alive in you. How did you navigate your way to a place of belonging and being comfortable in who you are and your place in the world? How can you apply this learning experience to support others in a similar situation?

Summative Activities

1. Consider which one of the 10 videos in this series stood out the most for you and why that is. Prepare a 3 min talk on the segment you found to be the most powerful to you. How has this film inspired you? Present it to the class.
2. Research the history of the neighbourhood you live in. Consider the First Peoples as well as the first immigrants. Write an essay presenting your findings. Alternatively, create a mixed media presentation of your choice to illustrate your findings.
3. Class discussion – 10 - 15 min: How did the arrival of South Asians affect Canadian identity?
4. Class discussion – 10 - 15 min: How might specific examples of past incidents of inequality be handled today under the Charter of Rights & Freedoms?
5. As a class, create a classroom dictionary for the Unit by recording definitions on large sheets of white paper that can be posted in the classroom. (See the Glossary page 63 of this Study Guide for a starting point.)
6. Get into groups of 3 – 4 and collectively choose a copy of your favourite magazine and analyze it for its representation of diversity and multiculturalism. Is their equal representation among ethnic and non-ethnic groups? How are these groups projected through the editorial content and advertisements? What do these projections communicate about these groups? Do you feel the publication accurately celebrates diversity and multiculturalism? Why or why not? If you could edit this magazine, what would you do exactly in terms of the content and advertising to support diversity and multiculturalism? Prepare a 3 min presentation for the class. (This activity can also be applied to other forms of media such as a television network or show, a radio station or program, website, etc.)
7. Class discussion – 10 - 15 min: How can we make concentrations of immigrants with similar cultural background in Canada feel welcome?
8. Refer to the South Asian Stories Chronology on page 43 of this Study Guide. What can students find to add to this timeline?



Image: Exterior of Second Avenue Gurdwara with large group, 1924. (Jagpal)

Appendix

South Asians Stories Chronology

Transcriptions

Glossary

Additional Resources

South Asian Stories Credits

South Asian Stories Chronology

Pre – 1900s

- 1757 The East India Company, a British controlled trading company, exercises military power and administrative functions over much of India.
- 1858 Beginning of British government control of India, also called the British Raj, when the role of the East India Company is transferred to the crown (Queen Victoria).
- 1897 A Sikh army regiment crosses Canada after attending Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebration in London, England.

1900s

- 1902 A Sikh army regiment from Hong Kong crosses Canada on their way to the coronation of Edward VII in London, England. Some return to Canada, establishing themselves in BC.
- 1903 The first wave of South Asian immigrants, mostly Sikh males from the northern Indian state of Punjab, arrive in BC to work as labourers on railway construction, in lumber mills and in the forest industry. Over 5,000 would arrive by 1908.
- 1904 Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh holy scriptures), brought to Canada by Arjan Singh, are kept at a house in Port Moody.
- Banto (Betty) Gill's grandfather, Bawa Singh Johal, is one of three brothers who settle in Kitsilano.
- 1906 Census indicates 2,100 South Asians immigrate to Canada.
- The first Sikh gurdwara (temple), meaning 'gateway to the guru', is established in Vancouver in a rented house.
- Khalsa Diwan Society, an organization to build a strong community based on Sikh values and principles, is established.
- Jagat (Jack) Uppal's father, Dalip Singh, arrives in Vancouver.
- 1907 Census indicates 2,623 South Asians immigrate to Canada.
- South Asian are denied the right to vote when the BC government passes a bill to disenfranchise all natives of India not born of Anglo-Saxon parents.

Foundation stone of the 2nd Avenue Gurdwara is laid at 1866 West Second Avenue in Vancouver.

Asiatic Exclusion League, an organization to prevent immigration of people of Asian origin, is formed in Vancouver.

An Anti-Asian Riot causes severe damage to Asian-Canadian businesses and homes in Vancouver.

Nine hundred Sikhs arrive in Vancouver on the Canadian Pacific steamer Monteagle.

- 1908 Canadian government implements the Continuous Journey act, requiring immigrants to travel directly from country of birth or citizenship to Canada. This provision, coupled with the requirement of having \$200 upon landing, drastically reduces the number of South Asians arriving in Canada.

Canadian government proposes a scheme to deport all the South Asians from Canada to British Honduras (Belize).

Bewa Singh Johal and his brothers help build the 2nd Avenue Gurdwara.

Balwant Singh, a Sikh pioneer, is the first Granthi (priest) of the 2nd Avenue Gurdwara.

Professor Teja Singh, a Sikh scholar, teacher and author, arrives in Vancouver.

- 1909 South Asians reject the Canadian government scheme to deport them from Canada to British Honduras (Belize).

Guru Nanak Mining and Trust company, an organization to secure the economic welfare of the Sikh community, is established by Professor Teja Singh.

1910s

- 1912 Gurdwaras are built in Victoria, Fraser Mills, and Abbotsford.

Hardial Singh Atwal, son of Balwant Singh and Bibi Kartar Kaur, is the first Sikh born in Canada.

- 1913 Ghadar Party, an organization founded by Sikhs in the US and Canada aimed at securing India's independence from British rule, is established.

Husain Rahim, along with other South Asian activists, successfully challenge the Continuous Journey regulation in BC's Supreme Court.

Canadian government prohibits artisans or labourers to land at any port of entry in BC on grounds the labour market is “overcrowded”.

- 1914 Komagata Maru departs Hong Kong (April 4), making stops in Shanghai (April 8), Moji (April 14) and Yokohama (May 3) to pick up additional passengers. Punjabi businessman Gurdit Singh organized the transpacific journey to challenge the Continuous Journey regulation.

A Shore Committee, in preparation for the arrival of the Komagata Maru, is formed during a meeting at the 2nd Avenue Gurdwara. Led by Husain Rahim and Bhag Singh, the Committee consists of fifteen local South Asians (May 17).

Komagata Maru arrives in Vancouver carrying 376 passengers - mostly Sikhs, but includes Hindus and Muslims. The Canadian and BC authorities prevent passengers from disembarking because they did not make a Continuous Journey from India to Canada (May 23).

Khalsa Diwan Society holds meeting with hundreds of South Asians and raises several thousand dollars in support of the Komagata Maru (May 30).

Husain Rahim, in the June issue (v.1, no.5) of the Hindustanee (the official organ of the United India League), writes an editorial entitled “Welcome to the Komagata Maru” (June 1).

Canadian Immigration Board of Inquiry hearings begin for 20 passengers who have previously resided in Canada. They are admitted, but officials refuse to admit the remaining 352 passengers, including Gurdit Singh. (June 1).

The Shore Committee sends provisions to the Komagata Maru (June 11).

Vancouver Mayor Baxter organizes a public anti-Asian rally where Conservative MP H.H. Stevens advocates for a “white Canada” (June 23).

BC Court of Appeal upholds the Board of Inquiry’s rejection of test case passenger (Munshi Singh), ruling passengers of the Komagata Maru did not arrive in Canada by Continuous Journey (June 29).

The Komagata Maru is served deportation order. A riot ensues on board as passengers seize control of ship, preventing crew from departing (July 17).

Armed police officers and immigration agents aboard the Sea Lion (a tugboat) attempt to board the Komagata Maru, but are chased off with bricks and other projectiles (July 18).

Prime Minister Borden orders a Canadian Navy vessel, HMCS Rainbow, to move the Komagata Maru out of Burrard Inlet by force if necessary. The Komagata Maru, escorted by HMCS Rainbow, departs without incident (July 23).

World War II begins when Britain declares war on Germany (August 4).

Immigration agent and government informant, William C. Hopkinson, reports that revolutionaries on Pacific Coast are urging South Asians immigrants to return to India to take up arms against British rule (August 11).

Komagata Maru arrives in India near Kolkata (Calcutta). Indian police attempt to force passengers onto a train destined for Punjab, but a riot results with 20 passengers being killed (September 29).

Mewa Singh shoots and kills immigration agent William C. Hopkinson at the Vancouver Courthouse to stop injustices being done to the Sikh community (October 21).

1915 Mewa Singh is hanged in New Westminster. Veneration of Mr. Singh begins with annual observances in Sikh temples. (January 11).

1916 Mayo Singh and Kapoor Singh Siddoo establish a saw mill (eventually called Paldi) near Duncan in the Cowichan Valley that over the years employs hundreds of South Asian immigrants.

1918 Census indicates Sikh population in BC drops to approximately 700.

A Sikh temple at Paldi opens.

Bewa Singh Johal and his brothers start a lumber cartage business at the Cedar Cove Sawmill near False Creek.

1919 Canadian government lifts immigration restrictions on bring wives and children under eighteen years old from India.

1920s

1920 South Asian women and children begin arriving in Canada.

1921 Census indicates 1,016 South Asians in Canada.

1923 Ajaib (Jab) Sidhoo, founder of East India Carpets in Kitsilano, is born in Punjab, the eldest of three children.

1924 Banto (Betty) Gill's father, Gurdas Singh Johal, arrives in Canada.

1925 Khalsa Diwan Society has branches at Vancouver, Abbotsford, New Westminster, Golden, Duncan, Coombs, and Ocean Falls.

Jagat (Jack) Singh Uppal, community leader, is born in the village of Uppal Jagir in Punjab, India.

1927 Ajaib (Jab) Sidhoo's father, Naranjan, comes to Canada and works in South Asian-owned sawmills on Vancouver Island.

1928 Banto (Betty) Gill, community leader, is born in Vancouver, the second eldest of eleven children, and grows up in Kitsilano.

1930s

1930 Ajaib (Jab) Sidhoo, age 7, is sent to Canada to join his father.

1931 Jagat (Jack) Uppal attends Lord Beaconsfield Elementary, one of the first Sikhs in Vancouver to go to public school.

1933 Vancouver Sikhs form the India Grass Hockey Club.

1935 A Sikh temple at Hillcrest sawmill opens.

1937 Harjit Dhillon, community activist and women's rights advocate, is born in the village of Bahawal in Punjab, India.

1940s

1941 Ajaib (Jab) Sidhoo joins the Canadian Airforce and works as an aircraft mechanic in Saskatchewan and the Yukon.

1944 Census indicates 1,756 Sikhs in Canada, 98% live in BC.

1946 Shushma Datt, broadcasting pioneer, is born in Nairobi, Kenya.

Banto (Betty) Gill marries Phangan Singh Gill, after he returns from serving in the Canadian Army during WW2.

1947 South Asians are granted franchise to vote and become Canadian citizens.

Canadian government removes the Continuous Journey regulation from South Asian immigrants.

India gains independence from British rule.

1948 Ajaib (Jab) Sidhoo opens a wholesale handcrafted carpet outlet, prior to founding East India Carpets in Kitsilano.

1949 Indian Prime Minister Nehru visits 2nd Avenue Gurdwara in Vancouver with daughter Indira Gandhi.

1950s

1951 Census indicates 2,148 South Asians in Canada.

Canadian government immigration quota of South Asians allowed into Canada set at India (150), Pakistan (100) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) (50).

1955 Harjit Dhillon immigrates to Canada and marries Manjit Dhillon, a union arranged by her father.

1957 Canadian government immigration quota of South Asians allowed into Canada increased from 150 to 300 per year.

1960s

1961 Census indicates 6,774 South Asians in Canada.

1962 Canadian government drops the quota system in favour of non-discriminatory immigration law. During this period, immigration from other parts of India and from Pakistan increases, with many being professionals.

1965 Shushma Datt moves to London, England, and works as a producer and host for the World Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation.

1967 Canadian government introduces new immigration regulations based on point system.

1969 Foundation stone for new gurdwara at 8000 Ross Street is laid.

1970s

1970 Khalsa Diwan Society opens Ross Street Gurdwara (April 25).

Punjabi classes started at Ross Street Gurdwara.

Sucha Singh Claire opens the first South Asian business, Shan Sarees and Drapery, at 6576 Main Street in what would become the Punjabi Market. Despite having no retail

experience, and being advised against opening a business where there were no other South Asian businesses, Mr. Claire reasoned that his store would attract traffic going to the new Ross Street Gurdwara.

Banto (Betty) Gill works as an interpreter for Canadian Immigration Service at the Vancouver Airport during an increase in immigration from South Asia.

1971 Census indicates 67,925 South Asians in Canada.

Jagat (Jack) Uppal buys a saw mill on Mitchell Island in the Fraser River, where he sponsors and hires new immigrants to help give them a start in Canada.

1972 All South Asians are expelled from Uganda - Canada accepts 7,000 refugees.

Immigrants from countries with communities of South Asian ancestry – including Kenya, Tanzania, Congo, Fiji, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Mauritius – begin to arrive in Canada.

Shushma Datt moves to Vancouver.

The India Mahila Association, co-founded by Harjit Dhillon, provides support for South Asian immigrant women.

1973 Banto (Betty) Gill is first woman elected to the board of the Khalsa Diwan Society.

1979 The Vaisakhi Festival, with an annual parade marking the Punjabi New Year, begins in Vancouver.

1980

1980 Punjabi Market, centered around Main Street and 49th Avenue, a three-block strip of approximately 110 South Asian businesses, becomes the largest Indian market outside of India. The Punjabi Market Association is formed.

1984 Operation Bluestar, a military attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab occurs. Thousands of innocent Sikhs were killed.

A protest denouncing the Golden Temple massacre is attended by 15,000 Sikhs in downtown Vancouver.

1985 Air India Flight 182 explodes over the coast of Ireland. The attack was organized by a small group of Sikh extremists, in retaliation for the Indian government's military actions in the Golden Temple. All 329 people on board were killed.

Wally Oppal, lawyer and politician, is appointed to the Supreme Court of BC.

- 1986 Manmohan (Moe) Sihota elected to the Legislative Assembly of BC, first South Asian to be elected to a legislature in Canada.

Khalsa School, a full time private school, is established in Vancouver.

Khalsa Credit Union, to provide financial service to the Sikh Community, is established.

- 1989 The 75th anniversary of the Komagata Maru incident.

1990s

- 1990 Plaque commemorating the Komagata Maru incident is placed at Portal Park in Vancouver by the municipal, provincial, and federal governments.

Canadian government amends the RCMP dress code to allow a turbaned Sikh join the force. Constable Baltej Singh Dhillon is the first baptized Sikh to join the RCMP.

- 1991 Three Sikhs are elected to the BC legislature - Harbhajan (Harry) Lalli, and Manmohan (Moe) Sihota and Ujjal Dosanjh, who hold various cabinet posts.

- 1992 Shushma Datt receives the Order of British Columbia, the first female South Asian recipient, for outstanding service to the province.

- 1993 Harbans (Herb) Dhaliwal, Vancouver politician, is one of four South Asians first elected as Members of Parliament in Canada.

Punjabi Market is officially recognized with bilingual signs in English and Punjabi.

- 1994 Plaque commemorating 80 years since the Komagata Maru incident is placed in Vancouver harbour.

- 1996 BC schools begin offering Punjabi language in its regular curriculum from grades five to twelve.

Sucha Singh Claire sells his business in the Punjabi Market, one of the many businesses that, in the following decades, that would either close due to high rents or relocate to Surrey to access the growing South Asian population.

2000s

- 2004 Diwali Fest, an annual South Asian arts and culture festival based on the Hindu celebration of light, is founded to present diverse art forms and bring together people of all backgrounds.

Vancouver International Bhangra Festival, founded by Mo Dhaliwal, presents cultural programming that engages artists, communities and festival attendees across genres of performance and ethno-cultural boundaries.

- 2005 Shushma Datt is the first woman in Canada to receive a license from the federal government to start an AM station - RJ1200.

The South Asian Arts Society, founded by Gurpreet Sian and Raakhi Sinha, creates performance and educational opportunities for professional and amateur artists and builds knowledge of South Asian culture.

- 2007 Harjit Dhillon's family opens a primary school in their ancestral village in Punjab, and awards annual scholarships to encourage students to continue their education.

- 2008 BC government issues a formal apology for the Komagata Maru incident.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologizes for the Komagata Maru incident at a community event in Surrey.

2010s

- 2011 Census indicates 1.6 million South Asians in Canada, among a population of 33 million.

Indian Summer Festival is founded to showcase artists of South Asian origin in performing, visual, literary and folk arts and foster dialogue between Canada and South Asia.

- 2012 Jagat (Jack) Uppal receives honorary doctorate, from Simon Fraser University, honouring his work for a more equal Vancouver, free from racism and discrimination.

- 2013 Banto (Betty) Gill is awarded the Queens Diamond Jubilee Medal for service to her fellow citizens, her community and her country.

- 2016 Monsoon Arts Festival, founded by the South Asian Arts Society, showcases South Asian theatre and performing arts.

The Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, apologizes in the House of Commons for the Komagata Maru incident.

Acknowledgements

South Asian Stories gratefully acknowledges the work of many historians, writers and researchers from the South Asian and academic communities upon which this chronology is based.



Image: First Vaisakhi Parade in Punjabi Market, 1987. (Pabla Family)

Film Transcriptions

First Immigrants

The Vancouver neighbourhood of Kitsilano, was named after the Squamish chief August Jack Khatsahlano. By the early 1900s, it was home to the city's oldest and largest South Asian community. The first South Asians to arrive in British Columbia in 1903, were Sikhs from British ruled India. Over 5,000 mostly young, single men travelled to many parts of the province, and worked as labourers on railroad construction and in the lumber industry. In Vancouver, South Asians were drawn to Kitsilano because of its proximity to the many lumber mills on nearby False Creek.

Some South Asian immigrants were entrepreneurial, and by 1916, owned and operated their own sawmills. Others started businesses, like delivering and selling wood as home heating fuel. But many South Asian workers faced discrimination, despite their reputation for being hardworking

and reliable. The number of South Asians entering Canada to find work was small compared to the hundreds of thousands of Europeans, but they were still a target of a powerful anti-Asian movement in BC. In 1907, the Canadian government took away the right to vote from South Asians, meaning they were excluded from the political process, and from becoming Canadian citizens. The following year, restrictions were placed on immigration, which separated families and stopped the growth of the community. But in 1919, the collective fight for rights by South Asians slowly started to effect change, when the wives and children of men living in Canada were finally allowed to immigrate. The South Asian population in Vancouver grew to become the largest of any city in North America, and was the main cultural and social centre of South Asians in BC. For the first time, a family life and a community life were becoming possible, and in local schools, South Asian children made up a part of the student body. In 1947, after 40 years of protests and petitions, the right to vote by South Asians was finally restored. In the 1960s, when racial restrictions were removed from immigration regulations, South Asian immigration increased dramatically. In the decades that followed, my family, who arrived in 1986, were among thousands of South Asians who choose to make Canada their home.

South Asians are an integral part of the Vancouver multicultural mosaic. South Asian culture is celebrated by many Canadians with festivals like Diwali, and Vaisakhi parades, which are the largest outside of India. In business and in politics, South Asians have made huge contributions, with many being elected to leadership roles. For over a century, South Asians have been making their place in Canada, along with indigenous and other cultures, they will continue in the years to come to define what it means to be Canadian.

Gurdwara

I'm standing at 1866 West 2nd Avenue in Vancouver, the site of the first Sikh temple in North America. Completed in 1908, the temple, or gurdwara, was built by early South Asian immigrants. For over sixty years, it provided the community with a sense of place, continuity and pride. And it was here, at the 2nd Avenue Gurdwara, where nearly every fight for social justice was organized and mobilized.

The need for a permanent gurdwara was recognized in 1906 by the Khalsa Diwan Society, a Sikh organization dedicated to building a strong community. Balwant Singh, a member of the Society, and the first priest, or granthi, of the gurdwara, helped lead a campaign to gather funds. Land in Kitsilano was cleared by hand by Sikhs, and the gurdwara was opened in 1908. It served as a place of worship, and as a place for the community to gather and share stories. The gurdwara was also at the centre of political and social justice campaigns, for immigration reform to allow South Asian women and children into Canada, and for regaining the right to vote after it had been taken away from South Asians in 1907. Under imperial rule in India, as British subjects, Sikhs were largely loyal to the British Empire. When they migrated to Canada, they expected the same rights as those given to other British subjects and to white immigrants. When these rights were not granted, many South Asians in BC, including Gurdwara granthi Balwant Singh, joined the Ghadar movement, a group of revolutionaries committed to ending British rule in India. In these early

years, the gurdwara was a gathering place for Sikhs, and for South Asians of all faiths and backgrounds. It also hosted dignitaries, like Rabindranath Tagore, Indian's first Nobel Laureate. After Indian Independence was achieved in 1947, the leader of India, Prime Minister Nehru, came to the gurdwara to personally thank South Asian Canadians for their support.

By the late 1960s, identifying a need for a larger space, the Sikh community in Kitsilano began fundraising for a new gurdwara. In 1970, a new, larger building was opened at 8000 Ross Street in South Vancouver. When the gurdwara was moved from Kitsilano, many in the community who had lived here for decades, moved with it. But the legacy of the 2nd Avenue Gurdwara – a testament to the strength and vision of the early South Asians – lives on.

Komagata Maru

On May 17, 1914, the Sikh community in BC held an emergency meeting here in Kitsilano. The meeting was to form a Shore Committee, to plan for the pending arrival in Vancouver of a steamship called the Komagata Maru. The Committee was led by Bhag Singh, a community leader and activist who lived at 1847 West 2nd Avenue in Kitsilano, and Hussein Rahim, an outspoken businessman and publisher. One week after the Shore Committee was formed, the Komagata Maru entered Burrard Inlet, on May 23, 1914. On board, were 376 passengers from Punjab, British India, including two women and four young children. For days, the arrival of the ship had been sensational, front-page news. As hundreds of Vancouverites watched from shore, the Komagata Maru was ordered to drop anchor, and confine all passengers to ship.

Prior to 1908, over 5,000 South Asians had arrived in British Columbia looking for a chance of a better life. Fearing the settlement of these “undesirables”, the Canadian government created legislation aimed to restrict their entry. A regulation called “continuous journey”, stated that all immigrants had to travel to Canada by direct passage from their country of origin – not possible from British India. The Komagata Maru, having started its voyage in Hong Kong, had not made a “continuous journey” from India. Sikh merchant, Gurdit Singh, had chartered the Komagata Maru to challenge the “continuous journey” regulation and open immigration from India to Canada. Local politicians urged the government to refuse to allow the ship to dock, and worked with immigration officials to detain the passengers. Except for 24 returning residents, none of the remaining 352 passengers were allowed ashore. Within days, stores of food and water were depleted. In response to the crisis, the Shore Committee raised funds to provision the ship. The committee also hired a lawyer to represent a single passenger - Munshi Singh - as a ‘test case’. In the BC Court of Appeal, it was argued that, as a British subject, Mr. Singh could not be denied entry to Canada because of race. But on July 6, 1914, judges sided with the Canadian government, and ruled that Mr. Singh would not be admitted to Canada, meaning all passengers on the Komagata Maru were denied entry. To enforce the ruling, the Canadian government ordered an armed takeover of the Komagata Maru. But the defiant passengers fought back, in what became known as the “Battle of Burrard Inlet. In response, the Canadian Army was mobilized, and a Canadian Navy ship was moved into Burrard Inlet. After a 62-day standoff, with all options exhausted, the Komagata Maru lifted anchor, and sailed out of Vancouver Harbour. It

was a bitter and deeply disappointing defeat for the 352 passengers, for the members of the Shore Committee, and for the larger South Asian community in British Columbia.

When the Komagata Maru reached India, police met the ship, and attempted to arrest Gurdit Singh and others who they regarded as political agitators. In the riot that followed, a few passengers escaped, but most were either injured, imprisoned or killed. In 2012, on the seawall in Coal Harbour, a memorial was unveiled in remembrance of the Komagata Maru, a powerful reminder of one of the most dramatic challenges to Canada's exclusion laws. The memorial represents the resilience and fortitude of the South Asian community of BC, and draws our attention to the plight of international migrants today.

Banto (Betty) Gill

1733 West 3rd Avenue, an address that no longer exists, was once home of one of the South Asian community's most admired women. Banto Betty Gill worked three jobs, baked cakes, mended fences, roofed houses, and even cheered for the Canucks. She was a colourful and innovative woman with a ready sense of humour. But most of all, Banto Betty Gill was known for her warmth and generosity.

Betty was descendant from one of the first South Asian families to immigrate to Canada. Her grandfather, Bawa Singh Johal, was one of three brothers who settled in Kitsilano in 1904. In 1908, the Johal brothers helped build the 2nd Avenue Gurdwara, and in 1918, they started a lumber cartage business at the Cedar Cove Sawmill near False Creek. Betty's father, Gurdas Singh Johal, arrived in Canada in 1924. In 1928, Betty was born, the second eldest of a rapidly growing family. Like other children in the close-knit South Asian community, Betty's early life revolved around the gurdwara. She attended local schools, including Kitsilano High, where she was a good student and an avid reader. Betty was also given private lessons to learn to read and write Punjabi. But when she was 14, her education was cut short. To help support her family, which had grown to 10 children, she left school and began working at a local industrial laundry. In 1946, Betty married Phangan Singh Gill, who had arrived in Canada in 1926 and had served in the Canadian Army during WW2. After their marriage, the Gills moved to a small farm in Richmond, near the Lansdowne Park racetrack. Betty started a family, owned and raced horses and created a home like Grand Central Station for people of all nationalities. In the 1970s, during an increase in immigration from South Asia, Betty worked as an interpreter for the Canadian Immigration Service at the Vancouver Airport. During their first few hours in Canada, she made hundreds of new immigrants feel welcome. In 1993, Betty retired from the Richmond Health Department – the last of her three jobs.

Banto Betty Gill was a respected leader both in the South Asian community and in the City of Richmond. In 2013, she was awarded the Queens Diamond Jubilee Medal for service to her fellow citizens, her community and her country. As a descendant of immigrants who arrived in Vancouver in 1904, Betty has written that she was a part of six generations of proud Canadians.

Ajaib (Jab) Sidhoo

The business behind me is East India Carpets, located at 1606 West 2nd Avenue. East India Carpets was opened by my grandfather Ajaib Sidhoo, also known as Jab. A skilled entrepreneur, Jab turned his store into a fixture in Vancouver and a base for community leadership and giving.

Jab Sidhoo was born in Punjab in 1923, the eldest of three children. In 1927, his father, Naranjan, came to Canada and worked at the Kapoor sawmill on Vancouver Island. When Jab was 7, he was sent to join his father. Unaccompanied by his family, he travelled for months in the care of a married couple from his village. At the mill site, while Naranjan worked long hours, Jab attended the one room schoolhouse. Jab also saw Naranjan pursue the federal right to vote, and with the International Woodworkers of America union, take the fight to the steps of the BC legislature. Jab's father's activism would later influence his own activism and philanthropy. In 1939, Jab left the mill and attended Vancouver Technical High School, wanting to learn a trade. A turning point in Jab's life was when he was among three from his class selected to join the Canadian Air Force during World War II. Though he didn't have the right to vote, Jab was proud to fight for his country. Stationed in Saskatchewan and in the Yukon, he worked as a mechanic maintaining a fleet of planes. After the war, Jab returned to Vancouver and developed an interest in imported, handcrafted carpets. While studying the carpet business in India, he met Nirmal Dutt, whose passions would influence Jab to become a supporter of the arts. In 1949, Jab and Nirmal were married. Back in Vancouver, Jab opened East India Carpets, while he and Nirmal bought a home and started a family. Over the years, the store became a vital part of the South Asian community in Kitsilano, carrying with it the memories of everyone who entered and had a conversation with Jab and his family.

As Jab's business thrived, he became known for his philanthropy. His love of sports led him to become one of the first one hundred people to invest in Vancouver's first professional football team in 1954, and he became a lifelong season ticket holder. Nirmal's influence inspired Jab to provide on-going support for authors attending the Vancouver Writers Festival. For decades, Jab maintained a tradition of support for many educational and health care endeavors, in both Canada and India. Hard-working, creative and generous - these are the qualities that embody Jab Sidhoo whose life and legacy are an inspiration to us all.

Punjabi Market

I'm at 6576 Main Street, the address of the first South Asian business to open near Main and 49th in Vancouver. In 1970, Sucha Claire opened Shan Sarees and Drapery, despite there being no other South Asian businesses in the area. But Mr. Claire knew that many recent South Asian immigrants, attracted to jobs in the mills along the Fraser River, had settled nearby. He had also realized that, with the opening of the new Gurdwara on Ross Street, his store might attract South Asian traffic going to the temple.

Mr. Claire was right – from a single fabric store in 1970, the strip along Main Street expanded rapidly and became the Punjabi Market. Other early businesses included the Frontier Cloth House, the Guru Bazaar and the Himalaya Restaurant, owned by my grandfather. When I was younger, lending a hand at the Himalaya helped me become more outgoing, and made me who I am today. By the 1980s, the strip had over one hundred stores and was the largest South Asian market outside of India. In the 1990s, it seemed retailers couldn't go wrong with a store in the Market. It didn't matter what was being sold - everyone came to shop. The Market was not only the cultural and economic heart of Vancouver's South Asian community, it attracted tourists and notable visitors – like musicians from Punjab and priests from the Golden Temple, the holiest Sikh Gurdwara. The Market was recognized by all levels of government and was the only place outside India with street signs in the Punjabi language. As music and dance are a huge part of South Asian culture, the Market has over the years hosted dozens of community celebrations, including the first ever Vaisakhi Day Parade in Vancouver in 1987.

As late as 2005, the Punjabi Market was vital and vibrant. But like other ethnic enclaves in Vancouver, the Market has faced pressure to survive. High rents on Main Street, and a shift in population to Surrey, caused some shop owners to close. Many South Asians businesses have remained, and will remain, but maybe in the future the Market will become more diverse to include a mix of different types of businesses. As someone who grew up in the Punjabi Market, it's important to me that it thrives. It's been nearly 50 years since the Market started, I look forward to what the next 50 will bring.

Harjit Dhillon

Behind me is the Sunset Community Center, on the south side of the Punjabi Market. For years, the Centre has been a home to support programs for older South Asians. One of the program organizers is my grandmother, Harjit Dhillon, a lifelong community activist. Harjit's own experiences motivated her to help others, especially racialized women - who can feel isolated and alienated in a new country and culture.

Harjit Dhillon was born in the village of Bahawal in the state of Punjab in British India. Her father, a freedom fighter against British Imperial rule in India, instilled in her a sense of social justice and political purpose. While she was still in grade school, Harjit joined a group of older women who went house to house in the village advocating for world peace. In 1955, at the age of 17, Harjit travelled to Canada – alone, with only six dollars in her pocket. She had left behind her large, close-knit family and everything else familiar to her. After nine days in Canada, Harjit married Manjit Dhillon, a union arranged by her father. Not yet able to speak English, Harjit felt isolated and homesick. Determined to make a new life in Canada, Harjit created a welcoming home like she'd had in India, and she and my grandfather started a family. In 1972, Harjit organized a meeting of friends – all community-minded, and politically active women. They established the India Mahila Association – with the aim of providing a much-needed network of support for South Asian immigrant women. Through the Association, South Asian women rallied for safe working conditions for farmworkers and for gender rights, often sharing their messages through

demonstrations, poetry and song. Another success was in the early 1990s, when a U.S.-based physician was promoting sex-selection services aimed at the South Asian community, a service that allowed for the rejection of unborn female children. The India Mahila Association organized against the ads and got them pulled from the local newspapers. The Association now consists of over 100 women - reflecting our community's cultural diversity.

While Harjit has fought for change in Canada, she has often returned to India to do charitable and humanitarian work. In 2007, her family opened a primary school in their ancestral village in Punjab. Each year, scholarships are awarded to four students to encourage them to continue their education. Back in Canada, after a remarkable six decades of service, Harjit Dhillon continues to be active, still working to educate by speaking out and building social justice programs that impact many of us today.

Jagat (Jack) Uppal

This part of South Vancouver near the Punjabi Market was home to Jagat Singh Uppal - better known as Jack Uppal. Jack's life, a legacy of hard work and service to others, represents an extraordinary achievement. As a young man, he developed a strong interest in social justice and community building. And as he grew older, he became a successful entrepreneur who consistently looked out for the needs of the South Asian community, and strived to improve life for all in the city that he loved.

Jack Uppal was born in 1925, in the village of Uppal Jagir in the Punjab, India. His father, Dalip Singh, was one of the early Sikhs who first arrived in BC in 1906. Mr. Singh was a member of the local Shore Committee during the Komagata Maru episode, and helped raise funds to provide food, water and legal assistance for the 376 passengers detained onboard the Komagata Maru in Burrard Inlet in 1914. In 1931, Jack attended Lord Beaconsfield Elementary, one of the first Sikhs in Vancouver to go to public school. In 1938, when Jack's father died tragically in an automobile accident, he was forced to quit his first year of high school to help support his family. Like many other young South Asian males, his first job, at age 14, was piling lumber at a sawmill on Vancouver Island. When Jack returned to Vancouver, he became president of the South Asian Youth Association, and helped lobby the government for the right to vote, which was taken away from South Asians in 1907. He – and others in the community – also helped establish the Ross Street Temple, by raising funds and selecting and purchasing the site. In 1971, after years in the lumber industry, Jack bought a saw mill on Mitchell Island, and called it Goldwood Industries. He sponsored new immigrants, and gave them their first job to help them get established in Canada. Jack was a leader for the wider South Asian community, and along with his family, acted as a hub and connector that assisted hundreds of newcomers.

Jack's decades of service have been recognized with several awards, including the Nehru Humanitarian Award and the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal. But it was his honorary doctorate, given by Simon Fraser University, that honoured his work for a more equal Vancouver, free from racism and discrimination. In his acceptance speech, Jack summed up his reasons for contributing

to public life. He said, “I love humanity and it is the essence of my being. I want to infect you with the same desire to do for others as you would do for yourself because greatness is defined by service.”

Shushma Datt

In the 1970s, when the Punjabi Market was getting started, radio and television programming for the South Asian community didn't exist. But broadcaster and media pioneer, Shushma Datt, changed everything. Known as the 'great connector', Shushma has not only given a voice to the South Asian community, she has also used her position and platform to draw attention to social issues.

Shushma Datt was born in 1946 in Nairobi, Kenya. Her family had lived in East Africa for two generations. As a student, Shushma has said she lacked confidence. When she got a small part in a radio play – she kept flubbing her lines. But later, when she heard her mistakes edited out on the radio, she thought, “That’s magic! I’m going to do that!” In 1963, Shushma moved to India, where she earned an arts degree from the University of Delhi, and worked as a reporter for The Times of India. In 1965, Shushma moved to London, England, and landed a job with the British Broadcasting Corporation. She started as typist, transcribing Hindi scripts for BBC World Service, but quickly moved to producing and hosting her own programs, broadcasting to millions of people across India. In the male-dominated media world of that time, Shushma dreamed of one day owning her own radio station. Although she was happy at the BBC, Shushma got married and moved to Vancouver in 1972. Deemed unemployable by mainstream broadcasters because of her heavy accent, she began working at a multilingual radio station. In 1981, she joined World View Television - Canada’s first multicultural Pay TV service – as their South Asian producer. A turning point in her career was an interview with Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, a controversial figure in the South Asian community. When viewers cancelled their subscriptions in protest, staff was let go – including Shushma. Determined to control her own destiny, Shushma created i.t. Productions, now Western Canada’s largest South Asian media organization. In 1987, she launched the Rim Jhim network, the first 24-hour radio station for South Asians outside India. In 2005, she became the first woman in Canada to receive a license from the federal government to start an AM station - RJ1200, now Spice Radio. Shushma also produces and hosts television programs on Shaw Cable Television and OMNI TV, including Women in Focus, a program close to her heart that takes on issues facing South Asian women in Canada.

For over five decades, and over four continents, Shushma has become a trail blazer and a role model. She’s received dozens of awards, including being the first female South Asian recipient of the Order of British Columbia. From flubbing lines as a schoolgirl, Shushma Datt has achieved her dream, and is now regarded as the First Lady of Canadian Radio.

South Asian Arts

My name is Mo Dhaliwal. As a kid, I used to love coming to the Punjabi Market. For my family, it was the best place for shopping. For me, the entire trip was for eating golguppa at the restaurants. The Market was a special, reassuring space as I struggled with identity elsewhere. For the first part of my life, I grew up in an entirely white neighbourhood, feeling and being told that I didn't belong. Later, living in a Punjabi neighbourhood, I was still feeling and being told that I didn't belong. This feeling persisted for much of my life, but I didn't know how to resolve it.

It wasn't until I moved back to Vancouver after being away for a few years, that I realized there was a social order, and I was lower in the rungs than the dominant culture. I set out, unconsciously at first, to "normalize" the cultural forms that I was familiar with. I liked music and going out dancing with friends, so I wanted to bring some of the Indian music scene I had experienced in San Francisco, to Vancouver. As I worked to make it more "normal" to have these kinds of events in Vancouver, I was making space for myself and my Punjabi community in other ways. My avenue to do all of this was to create a Punjabi arts festival called the Vancouver International Bhangra Celebration. In 2005, we produced our inaugural event, an exhibition of bhangra featuring dance teams from all over North America. Working through the Festival, I was able to act as an impresario to make things happen that I wanted to see happen. It allowed me to create a sense of belonging for myself, to disrupt main stream culture and explore what it means to be Punjabi in public spaces. In turn, I gained a deeper appreciation for my community's struggle, and the nuances of their approach to life - things that I often had a habit of criticizing.

Much was accomplished through the bhangra festival, and there is still much to do. Belonging, sense of place, being misunderstood - these were things I was struggling with... and was mostly able to resolve. I'm no longer involved in the Festival, but it's encouraging to see it continue to grow and evolve. It's inspiring to see it push boundaries for public dialogue, give my own community a chance to reimagine themselves, and explore new relationships between people and culture.

South Asian Stories Glossary

Discrimination - The process of treating people differently in a negative way, depending on their collective social position or identity, such as: race, class, sexuality, ability, political, belief, religion, language, or ancestry.

Cultural Diversity - The quality of diverse or different cultures, as opposed to monoculture, the global monoculture, or a homogenization of cultures, akin to cultural decay. The phrase cultural diversity can also refer to having different cultures respect each other's differences.

Ethnicity - Belonging to a social group that has a shared cultural heritage, ancestry, origin myth, history, homeland, language or dialect, symbolic systems (such as religion, mythology and ritual), cuisine, dressing style, art, and physical appearance.

Gurdwara - A place of worship for Sikhs. People from all faiths, and who do not profess any faith, are welcome in Sikh gurdwaras.

Immigrant - A person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country.

Indian Subcontinent - The Indian Subcontinent is made up of the following countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Komagata Maru Incident - The Komagata Maru incident involved the Japanese steamship, Komagata Maru, on which some 350+ citizens from British-Ruled India attempted to immigrate to Canada in 1914. However, they were denied entry due to anti-Asian legislation that was drawn up at the time.

Mandir - A place of worship for Hindus. People from all faiths are welcome.

Mosque - A place of worship for followers of Islam.

Punjabi - Punjabi is an Indo-Aryan language spoken by over 100 million native speakers worldwide, making it the 10th most widely spoken language in the world.

Racism – is discrimination and prejudice towards people based on their race or ethnicity.

South Asians - Refers to those born in or can trace their ancestry to South Asia, which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives.

Stereotyping - A generalizing used to describe a whole group of people based on prejudice opinions, or based on the words or actions of a single member of that group.

(Source: Wikipedia)



Image: Family wedding group. 196_ (SFU Kohaly Collection)

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Rupa Vig • Saima Naz Family • Sargeet Singh Jagpal • Shushma Datt • Simon Fraser University
Sucha Claire • Vancouver International Bhangra Celebration • Vancouver Public Library
Vancouver Sun • Vintage Air Photos

Special Thanks

Smita Acharyya • Wendy Au • Cindy Bains • Raj Chouhan • Sucha Claire • Joanne Curry
Shushma Datt • Harjeet Dhaliwal • Manjit and Harjit Dhillon • Sital Dhillon • Robin Folvik
Asha Fraser • Charan Gill • Melanie Hardbottle • Linda Hay • Paul Hendren •
Sargeet Singh Jagpal • Hugh Johnston • Nadeem Parmar • Krishna Pendakur
Dr. V. Setty and Rajinder Pendakur • Linda Kawamoto Reid • Ravi Sidhoo

South Asian Stories was made possible with a grant from TELUS STORYHIVE
and is also available for free on demand on TELUS Optik TV on Demand



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and by



Produced by
Orbit Films Inc.

*South Asian Stories was produced on the
unceded lands of the Coast Salish Territory.*